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伦理批评视角下的《二手烟》

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硕 士 学 位 论 文

伦理批评视角下的《二手烟》

An Ethical Study of Thane Rosenbaum's *Second Hand Smoke*

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## Abstract

By referring to Jewish ethics reflected both in Judaism and Jewish tradition and the situation of Holocaust writing, starting from the narrative strategies of the novel, this M.A. thesis aims to uncover the ethical appeals both explicitly advocated by Thane Rosenbaum and implicitly expressed in his *Second Hand Smoke*. The narrative is full of fragmentations with transferring time and space. The past and the present appear simultaneously for comparison. Accompanied by an omniscient third-person narrator, the author gives main characters points of view and depicts them with multifaceted personalities. The narrative not only shows the situation of Jews in the post-Holocaust era, but also the author's ethical appeals. Non-Jews should respond to the historical past and Jews should realize personal responsibility as Jews. By portraying characters with different attitudes towards the Holocaust and their responsibility, making the ones with Jewish ethics have a better knowledge of life, the author advocates the recovery of Jewish ethics in the post-Holocaust era. Thus my thesis begins with the author's main narrative strategies and keeping in mind ethical appeals behind it, goes on with reference to Jewish ethics, albeit with subjective comments based on cultural and textual analysis and hopes for a clearer view of the author's ethical appeals and the novel's ethical dimension.

The thesis consists of four parts.

In the introduction part, brief information of Holocaust writing and a brief overview of Thane Rosenbaum and his *Second Hand Smoke* are given.

The first chapter focuses mainly on the author's ethical appeals in the novel. Multiple points of view on ethics and multifaceted characterization on one hand give readers a chance to make objective judgments of characters involved, one the other hand activate readers' deeper thoughts on the nature of human limits. Besides, time and space also play vital parts in exposing the ethical dimension of the novel.

The second chapter is mainly on the ethical theme of responsibility. Jewish

ethics could trace back to Judaism in which ethical obligations are emphasized in daily life. Jewish ethics concern more personal experiences, from which Jews gain knowledge of life and values. For Jews, the post-Holocaust world is filled with the crisis of faith, spiritual trauma, and lack of responsibility. Referring to the Jewish thoughts and Jewish traditional values, this chapter underlies the fading of traditional Jewish values in the post-Holocaust era. By criticizing American individualism, Rosenbaum also highlights the significance of interpersonal responsibility. Therefore, the thesis continues to explore the return of responsibility by textual analysis. In the end, Holocaust survivors face their past and the ex-criminal redeems his conscience and children of Holocaust survivors also come to terms with their parents' experience. They realize and accept their responsibility rather than reject and escape.

Finally, the thesis concludes with the significance of exploring the author's ethical appeals and the novel's ethical dimension. Holocaust Literature can function as a way to commemorate the historical past and to arouse the human consciousness that a tragedy such as the Holocaust should not be repeated.

**Key Words:** Narration; Jewish Ethics; Responsibility; Second-generation Holocaust Literature



## 摘要

这篇硕士论文从小说的叙事策略出发，借鉴犹太传统和大屠杀文学创作所体现的犹太伦理，旨在揭示西恩·罗森鲍姆在其作品《二手烟》中所体现的伦理诉求。小说的片段叙事和交错的时空安排让过去与现在有更清晰的对比。在全知的第三人称视角下，作者同时赋予主要人物视角。小说的主要人物形象都是多面和饱满的。人物的塑造不只体现犹太人的生活状况，也体现作者的诉求。犹太人应保持对犹太伦理的信心，特别是对个人责任的认同。通过表现对犹太人悲惨历史的不同态度，并安排秉承犹太伦理的人物拥有更明智的人生观，作者也倡导犹太伦理的回归。因此，本文从作者的主要叙事策略出发并结合叙事背后的伦理诉求，借鉴犹太伦理，并结合文化方面的一些文本分析，旨在突出作者的伦理诉求，更清晰地再现小说的伦理色彩。

本文由四部分组成。

绪论部分主要探讨大屠杀文学，并简要介绍西恩·罗森鲍姆及《二手烟》。

第一章主要分析作者基于伦理诉求的叙事。基于伦理意识而进行的多重视角的安排和多方位的人物塑造不仅让读者对人物能有客观的判断，也让读者对人性的不完美有更深的反思。另外，交织的时间和纵横的空间在体现小说的伦理色彩上也表现很突出。

第二章主要讨论小说的责任伦理主题。犹太伦理主要来源于融于日常生活中的犹太教教义。大屠杀之后的犹太人面临着信仰危机、精神创伤等问题，人与人之间缺少应有的责任感。追溯犹太思想和传统价值观，本章揭示了后大屠杀世界里传统犹太价值观的淡化，并通过对美国个人主义的批评，在文本中凸显责任的回归的意义。因此，本文采取文本细读的方式，继续探讨《二手烟》中责任意识回归的现象。在小说的结尾，大屠杀幸存者坦诚对待自己的过去，纳粹战犯也做出了忏悔。幸存者的后代也在自己的探索中真正理解了父母的过去。他们不能拒绝接受历史，更不能逃避过去，而应该承担起自己的责任。

最后，本文在结论部分总结了探讨作者伦理诉求和小说伦理色彩的积极意义。大屠杀文学至少能警示人们：类似犹太大屠杀这样的历史悲剧不该重演。

**关键词：**叙事 犹太伦理 责任 二代大屠杀文学



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## Introduction

After many years of silence towards the Holocaust, novelists and critics began to touch upon the subject of the Holocaust in the 1960s. Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1960) brought the Holocaust to millions of Americans. Primo Levi's *The Nazi Assault on Humanity* (1961) described the Holocaust as the most barbaric moment in human history. By the 1970s hundreds of works on the Holocaust have contributed to the flourish of Holocaust Literature. In the 1980s, writings on the Holocaust have gone on from the witnessing generation who either described directly sufferings in death camps or made philosophical comments on the inhumanity of the Holocaust, such as Emil Fackenheim and Irving Greenberg, to the second generation novelists who depict the suffering of Holocaust survivors and especially children of those survivors in the post-Holocaust era such as Thomas Friedman's *Damaged Goods* (1984), Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986), Barbara Finkelstein's *Summer Long-a-Coming* (1987), and Julie Salamon's *White Lies* (1987), etc. Their works are known as Second-generation Holocaust Literature or as some critics called "post-Holocaust narrative", which focus on the lives of Holocaust survivors' children. Theological concern and a return to tradition also emerged in the works of Cynthia Ozick, such as *The Messiah of Stockholm* (1987) and *The Shawl* (1989), with emphasis on the fatal aftermath of the Holocaust, the memory of which has destroyed the life of survivors and estranged family relationships in the post-Holocaust era. Saul Bellow also emphasized survivors' problems in his *The Bellarosa Connection* (1989).

Alvin Rosenfeld called the Second-generation "those who were never there but know more than the outlines of the place" (19). And in Alan Berger's words, they are "people who witness the continuing survival of their survivor parent(s)" ("American Jewish Fiction.' Modern Judaism" 229), and "their writings weave their parents' memories with their own imagination" ("Bearing Witness: Second Generation Literature of the 'Shoah'" 43). In Berger's essay "American Jewish Fiction", he

points out that “Second generation novels report childhoods in which the children of survivors felt estranged from at least one of their survivor parents and from all of their American friends” (“‘American Jewish Fiction.’ Modern Judaism” 230). He also suggests that those works “center on the issue of Jewish identity”, in which “their parents’ experience, anti-Semitism, and continuing forms of violence compel these novelists to write with the hope of both informing and possibly saving the world” (“‘American Jewish Fiction.’ Modern Judaism” 230). Those comments, though appearing in 1990, actually fit in with Thane Rosenbaum’s works, especially the one written in 1999, *Second Hand Smoke*.

Beginning writing in the 1990s, Thane Rosenbaum (1960- ) seems to have taken his steps after such novelists as Cynthia Ozick, with their consistent emphasis on the destructiveness of Holocaust memory and their ethical appeals for a world with justices and responses. Rosenbaum is the child of Holocaust survivors and grew up in Miami Beach just as Duncan Katz did in *Second Hand Smoke*. He writes with deep insight into the lives of those Holocaust survivors and their children in the post-Holocaust world. In *Children of Job*, Alan Berger has listed Rosenbaum in a group of second generation writers who write about the post-Holocaust world in pursuit of Jewish and American concerns. It reminds us that nowadays American Jewish writers face the dilemma that is both historical and realistic, for they are writers imprinted with both specific Jewish traditions and American popular culture. Rosenbaum is surely one of them. But he seems to stand in line with those advocating Jewish tradition. The author overtly shows his stance on Holocaust writing both in his arguments in real world and his critique in the novel. While some writers portray directly survivors’ life during and after the Holocaust, Rosenbaum portrays from the perspective of children of survivors, whose experiences direct exactly to the aftermath of the Holocaust in modern society with new focuses. While some writers tend to refuse to be called Jewish writer, Rosenbaum writes with such a concern as to retain Jewish traditional values. Moreover, as a child of Holocaust survivors himself, Rosenbaum tends to have more to say on his experiences in the post-Holocaust era. In the 1990s Holocaust themes include not only the survivors’

traumatic experiences both during and after the Holocaust and the striving for regaining their Jewish identity, but also the ethical themes, such as conscience, justice and responsibility. Although works on the quest for Jewish identity in an assimilating American society have flourished in the hands of famous writers, such as Saul Bellow and Isaac Singer and so on, second generation writers such as Thane Rosenbaum have contributed to enrich the meaning of Jewish traditional ethics.

*Second Hand Smoke* (1999) is the second of Rosenbaum's triptych. The others are *Elijah Visible* (1996), which won the 1996 Edgar Lewis Wallant Award, and *The Golems of Gotham* (2002). All of them focus on the experience of children of Holocaust survivors in the post-Holocaust world. Emily Miller Budick interprets "second hand smoke" as "secondary or inherited trauma", "a trauma not one's own becomes the basis for repressed, hysterical behavior" (217), a trauma that is fully illustrated in the aggressive behavior of the main characters, victims of Holocaust smoke. *Second Hand Smoke* is about Holocaust trauma that shadows the lives of survivors and their children. The narrative focuses on the perspective of Duncan Katz, one of survivors' children. In his eyes, the aftermath of the Holocaust has made their parents "walking dead" and their own lives full of crises. Born in America, Duncan Katz is a Jew torn between the Holocaust legacy and American ideology. Just as some American Jews who regard the Holocaust as irrelevant to their lives, Duncan is always on the verge of being destroyed by his Jewish Holocaust legacy which he wished were not his own. According to Duncan, his tragic life is the consequences of his irresponsible parents, a father rendered impotent by the Holocaust, and a mother who fails to mother her child. Mila, a Holocaust survivor, who was accused of child abuse by her son, has endured life that is unfathomable to her. She trains little Duncan like a soldier without showing any sign of maternal kindness. She lives a life that is unacceptable to traditional Jewish values. At the end of her life, she reveals the biggest secret in her life. She has abandoned her first child Isaac in Poland, and what's more, she engraved her number in concentration camps onto the arm of 6-month-old Isaac years ago. However, she is a typical survivor. In America her son Duncan still lives on with her past, and unfortunately he becomes

the memorial candle for the Holocaust. He is so occupied by the unjust Jewish history that he is overzealous over chasing ex-Nazi criminals. In the end, his marriage fails. His wife Sharon takes away with her their daughter, Milan. His job as a Nazi criminal hunter is also lost because of his illegal way of acquiring evidence. He is almost consumed by anger and despair. He hunts Nazi criminals, one of whom named Maloney, with even more radical zeal. However, things begin to change since the uncovered secret of the existence of his brother Isaac, the caretaker of a Jewish cemetery in Poland as well as a yoga teacher with Zen disciplines. The brothers meet and experience mysterious concentration camp suffering. At last with Isaac's help and his own reflections, Duncan lets go of his anger, compromises with the family past and finds hope in the future by returning to his daughter and teaching Holocaust Literature in a university. Maloney commits suicide at last, but before that, he has made his redemption quite well by helping Duncan. The ending is quite positive in that it shows the return of personal responsibility for the past, for the present and for the future.

So far, the reception of Rosenbaum's works is generally positive. As Budick has pointed out, "The by-far larger and more significant group of American fictions [...] deal explicitly with the survivor experience, though they may contain flashbacks to the events themselves" (216). Rosenbaum's *Second Hand Smoke* is listed in this group. Adam Meyer points out that "looking at the works of Lev Raphael and Thane Rosenbaum—we can see that Judaism as a religious idea is a prevalent concern among many of the third-generation Jewish American writers who began to publish in the 1980s and 1990s" (104). Critics have contributed more comments on his first book, *Elijah Visible*, while the second book receives less. One of the reasons may be that the novels in the trilogy all deal with similar topics, critics may do a similar job in interpreting the same topic with trauma theory or psychological analysis. In China, we have few critical articles on the novel *Second Hand Smoke*. If there is any, the emphasis is more on the traumatic aftermath of the Holocaust with psychological analysis, such as Xu Dongjuan's M.A. thesis "The Holocaust Trauma and Recovery: The Second Generation in *Second Hand Smoke*" (2010). However, in my



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